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LILIAN TAY, 47
Partner at Veritas Architects
Sdn. Bhd.

She's dynamic, articulate and down to earth. There's no doubt Lilian Tay, partner at Veritas Architects, has a beautiful mind. Architecture was a way to fuse both the practical and creative. "It is a very wide discipline that encompasses both the sciences and the arts, both of which I enjoy," she says. "Creating buildings serves the real and tangible needs of people yet gives you space to be imaginative and artistic."

Becoming an architect is a lifelong learning process, according to Lilian. Honing your skills takes years and so will coming to terms with the many diverse

ideas, multiple schools of thought and methodological approaches in the field. "Architecture, being also a design industry, is of course subject, like it or not, to the ebb and flow of fashion, fads and style and not least, the vagaries of consumer marketing," she explains.

Lilian has always put education on top of her priority list and this has taken her to the level she's now at. "My parents didn't have the opportunity to go to university so it was clear to us kids that we had to do better. We had no money but my dad would ensure he always got us lots of books and even various sets of encyclopedias as we grew up which I'd happily read from front to back. So, I must thank him for instilling in us early

on, the importance of learning," she recalls. Besides that, she also had very good teachers in her secondary school, in particular, her history and English literature teacher who made her see the beauty of words and language and to understand the meaning of history beyond relating factual events.

The architect's thirst for knowledge didn't end there. Lilian was privileged enough to get a scholarship to study in Princeton University where she had remarkable colleagues and professors who were all passionate in their respective areas of learning. During her time there, she was exposed by the liberal arts environment to a wide range of thoughts in many fields.

In order to attain excellence in all she does, Lilian believes she must be willing to put in the effort and the time, if necessary, to do things over and over again. "One must never be afraid of working hard—I believe great things can only be achieved with a lot of persistence and perseverance," she says.

Despite being a partner at Veritas, Lilian thinks she still has far to go. Beyond her immediate job, she also thinks it's important to contribute to the community at large, even if it's within her field. "Through my involvement with organisations such as Badan Warisan Malaysia and PAM or with other like-minded individuals, I have also spent time advocating and writing on some public interest issues in which I believe architects should take a lead role such as conservation of heritage buildings, the making of our cities especially Kuala Lumpur, the making of public places for our community, building up appreciation for architecture, heritage and a design culture here."

For Lilian, there have been many from whom she's learnt something important at different stages of her life. "I think one can learn something from everyone. I learn from the tea lady at work that no matter what level you are at, there is room for excellence, to do your job to the best possible standards."



**DATUK DR. NOR ASHIKIN
MOKHTAR, 50**
**Founder of PrimaNora
Medical Centre**

"My mother, who was a dental nurse, always told me that when we do good for others, good things will come back to us. So, I always wanted to be a doctor in that sense," Dr. Nora says. "But I got distracted along the way...suddenly I wanted to be a ballerina or air stewardess so I could see the world. But somehow I knew that I would end up becoming a doctor, it was my calling."

Dr. Nora realised medicine was her field of choice when she went to university 25 years ago. At that time, you could count the number of bumiputra women there were in the gynaecological field. She then made a pact with God that if she passed, she would dedicate her life to helping women not only medically but also in other ways. She still continues to empower and inspire them.

"So, I work with NGOs and the Women's Ministry where I give talks and seminars," she says.

"Throughout the years, I realise it's not about being a doctor; it's about being a friend, teacher and advisor. I need to be a friend to my patients because they need to trust me so they can open up. When I deliver their babies, they are so happy and their happiness brushes on to me. That's what keeps me going. It's a relationship that grows over the years. Whether she is a prostitute or a queen, she is my VIP," she reveals.

You wouldn't think it to look at her but Dr. Nora had a hard life growing up and it was this hardship that steered her towards building her mind and setting a higher bar for herself. She knew what she wanted and, in the end, graduated as a doctor with distinction. Even though she got married young and had a child while she was still studying, she didn't ask her mother for money. She did it on her own as she felt it was her responsibility.

"It was then that I learned a lot about time management, financial management and sharing," she says. "I was very

determined though. The past doesn't determine the future. I believe that we're in charge of our circumstances. I wanted to be successful. I knew what I wanted and I achieved it."

Today, the doctor is a mother of five and happily married for 29 years. While her strength is an inspiration to us all, she herself admires and respects a few people for their different traits—Anthony Robbins for his ability to motivate, Mother Theresa for her warmth and kindness, Nelson Mandela for his strength and resilience, Lady Diana for her beauty and kindness and Prophet Mohammad for his gentleness.

"My goals keep changing over the

years. When I graduated, I wanted to have my own practice. Then I wanted a sports car which I did before I turned 40," she says. My next goal is to have a women's centre of excellence. A hospital dedicated to women," she says. PrimaNora is the first step towards achieving this with Dr. Nora's full goal materialising in the next three years. Still, she's not one to rest on her laurels. "I also want to be an author of a best selling book," she adds.

"I love what I'm doing. Going to work is like meeting a new lover everyday. Every patient has a new story to tell. And I give them solutions to their problems. Everything can be solved and I want to solve their problems." **mc**

